Constipation of the Bowels. #8

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An Essay on

Constipation of the Bowels

by J. B. Paul.

Constipation

Experience is generally attributed to those who attempt writing on a practical subject, but as my opportunities of obtaining it, have as yet, been but limited, it will therefore be chiefly to the observations of others, that I shall be indebted for the remarks contained in the following Essay.

Constipation is a very interesting and in many cases a highly important subject. Its importance every one must admit who considers how often the disease is exhibited by sympathies of more remote parts, where the Practitioner unless fully aware of the nature of the complaint, will be foiled in his efforts to impart relief and exhausted nature will eventually give up the struggle. This was the result of the case of a Lady mentioned in one of the numbers of the London Medical Observations & Enquiries, where, at one time the Uterine System was supposed to be the seat of the disease, at another the Bladder was suspected and not until many weeks had elapsed was the true nature of her case understood; a mass of impacted faces lying in the sigmoid flexure of the Colon was the cause of her symptoms, but knowledge at this time was

of no avail – the patient was worn out. The Bowels are oftener perhaps the primary cause of certain diseases than are generally suspected and there frequently occur affections of the Head &c which can only arise from the Irritation caused by retained faeces, spasm, worms, or some other cause located in the intestines. Dr Wistar used to relate the case of a child who was completely relieved from the most painful maniacal symptoms by the free discharge of Ascarides from the rectum.

From the following case which fell under my immediate notice last Summer, I think it pretty evident, that Intestinal Irritation from faeces may excite a sympathy in the Brain which will eventuate in a diseased operation of the mind. The following is the note I took of the case –

August 10th 1822 I accompanied a Practitioner to visit a patient who had exhibited some indications of a disordered brain for many days previous; when we saw her she was quite maniacal having a disposition to bite and snap at all around her; it was truly distressing to see this little sufferer shewing such confirmed dislike for those she was

wont to love. It appeared from what the mother stated, that the little girl had complained of some uneasiness about the Belly, and as far as she knew, had not any evacuation for many days. There was particularly remarked in this case a peculiar blueness about the mouth and I am informed that it is not uncommon to perceive this blue appearance especially in the Bowel affections of Children.

The Physician immediately conceived the cause of these distressing symptoms to lay primarily in the bowels, and with this view of the subject, ordered a Cathartic, to be followed by an enema, should the former not procure a stool. As the Child appeared in great pain, a few drops of Laudanum were administered, and fearing lest Spasm might have some agency in producing the diseases, the warm bath was exhibited. On his next visit, he told me, he had the satisfaction of finding the little girl rescued from her alarming situation and her anxious mother released from her solicitude; the medicine had operated very promptly and the child had discharged an immense quantity of hardened faeces.

Now from what I have stated, and judging also from the quantity and consistence of the evacuations, I think, there can be little doubt, but that these unpleasant symptoms were entirely the result of Irritation caused by the retention of hardened faces, tho' spasm in the first place might have had some agency.

The common opinion of Constipation is, that tho' a very inconvenient disease, it is by no means a dangerous one, that a little cathartic medicine will do away the evil and restore the bowels to their pristine tone & vigour. Experience proves this to be a very fallacious opinion, and tho' the generality of cases may require but little to relieve, still cases do occur where unless prompt and appropriate treatment be pursued, a valuable life, may be lost. It is not believed that death in these cases, whether resulting from spasm or from mere irritations from faces, is entirely induced by an Inflammatory Diathesis, nor yet the result of disorganization as in Peritonitis, but that it is the consequence of so severe pain, that the system is unable to bear it — the bowels being a vital and tender part — if they be subjected to

for a length of time to much irritation, must necessarily lead to a fatal result.

A variety of circumstances may give origin to this unpleasant condition of the alimentary canal, and in enumerating them, it may not be deemed improper to speak of it as the result of spasms, as is evinced in the Colica Pictonum &c. The constipation from this cause is often extremely obstinate and the pain very great. Every day's experience furnishes us, with examples, of painters, plumbers, and the numerous artificers employed in the raising of Lead from mines or in the manufacturing of its several preparations, attacked with the dreadful symptoms which attend this disease. Its prevalence however is considerably diminished since the institution of a Prophylactic plan, consisting of the daily use of sweet oil, a wine glass full taken every morning fasting.

Colica Pictonum tho' a very painful complaint, may now be considered under the control of our art, and seldom at the present time if appropriate treatment be pursued, proves fatal. "The patient is attacked with severe pain and spasmodic twisting in the bowels, which are mostly obstinately constipated

the pulse is often very similar to that in some cases of Gout and Rheumatism – the slow bounding pulse" The faces are generally of a whitish clay like colour, evidently shewing a deficiency of Bile and other intestinal fluids. – Hence, the efficacy of Mercury in this disorder, is pretty well established – it is in fact the medicine on which our chief reliance is to be placed.

Dr Clutterbuck was the first, I believe, who introduced this, as a remedy, in the treatment of the Colic Pict; conceiving that the effects of Lead were not only different but very opposite to those of Mercury – he therefore thought it, no improbable supposition a priori, that Mercury might afford relief in those affections produced by the deleterious influence of Lead on the system. I need not say, that experience has amply verified these opinions. Its use should be continued until a gentle ptyalism is induced, when, generally a removal of the spasm is effected – and it may here be remarked, that often, so complete is the loss of tone in the intestines, that there will in many cases (even after salivation has taken place) several days elapse, before they will acquire sufficient vigour to expel their contents. In addition, to mercurials, Opium, as

being calculated to alleviate pain, and resolve spasm, may be advantageously employed – the combination of Calomel and Opium, to lay by with at night; when the object is to affect the system – this is a very favourite remedy. – The lancet may be used, in cases where there is fever attending, or it may operate favourably in relaxing structures. – The warm bath is useful, but where there is much debility, this cannot be resorted to; here we would substitute fomentations by bricks taken out of boiling water and wrapped in flannel – by inducing cutaneous action, they may have a great tendency in relieving spasmodic action – In addition to these Cathartics and anodyne enemata are of primary importance in the cure. – A large blister to the abdomen has often a very happy effect. Slight cases of the disease may yield to Cathartics alone – and to this indication Jalap and Cremor Tartar; are well adapted – It is not uncommon for the complaint to terminate in paralysis of the wrists and upper extremities. – Colica Pictonum may be distinguished from Enteritis by the following circumstances. There is not that tenderness and soreness on pressure, as

in Enteritis, on the contrary pressure rather alleviates than increases the pain in Colic, The absence of fever in the early stage of the attack; and the peculiar twisting pain & retraction of the navel afford another criterion, The constancy of the pain in Enteritis is a diagnostick symptom.

2, Gout and Rheumatism translated or affecting the Alimentary Canal often prove a source of Constipation and in these cases, the symptoms are of a very mixed character being Inflammatory and spasmodic - requiring the free use of the lancet, Antispasmodics, Cathartics &c. In the case of a Gentleman who was affected in this manner the condition of the Bowels was such, as to induce the Practitioner to resort to the tobacco enema - it was attended by the happiest result; he said, it seemed as if the stricture and pain had been suddenly removed.

But in this disease, there occur cases, where the prostration is such as to forbid the detraction of Blood, and in which, the tobacco Injection, would be in the highest degree hazardous.

3 Constipation is often the consequence of Enteritis or of

Peritoneal Inflammation - an effusion of Lymph producing adhesions in different parts of the intestinal tube and thereby resisting the peristaltic action - We should, therefore, when called to a case of Inflammation of the Bowels, be particularly on our guard to prevent such an unpleasant result - for when the case has proceeded thus far, it may be regarded in a measure as hopeless - all the purgatives &c which we may employ, procuring little or no effect. It is however, to be much lamented that the disease often comes on in such an insidious manner, that the fatal blow is struck, before the patient or even the Practitioner is aware of the danger - A case of this kind was related to me, where the cause of the obstinate obstructions of the Bowels remained unknown until disclosed by an examination post mortem - the intestines appeared universally agglutinated, and the medicines which had been administered to excite their action, were found pretty much in the same order as when taken. I was, lately, present at the examination of the body of a gentleman, where these adhesions were present, and in whom, worn down by continual disease it appeared like the last effort of expiring

nature. Could this have been the result of Inflammation?
4 It frequently happens that some Organic derangement affords an obstacle to the free evacuation of the faces, producing in some instances, an almost insurmountable degree of Constipation. Of this nature is, First,
Stricture of the Rectum, This is not a very uncommon disease and is well worthy the contemplation of a Physician when considering the cause of obstinately Constip.d Bowels This disease sometimes produces, nearly a total obliteration of the Canal of the rectum, and as the gut decreases in diameter, the efforts to expel the faces become more violent & the disease assumes a more rapid pace. till finally exhausted with pain, the sufferer yields to his fate.
Such is the progress of the complaint when not arrested by art. "Stricture of the rectum, says Mr Copeland, like stricture of parts of similar structure may be produced by whatever excites inflammation or irritation of the inner membrane of the canal. It may therefore be simple thickening of the coats of the intestine, which will produce the same distress as far as regards the impediment

to the passage of faces as if it depended on specific disease"
It is said, sometimes to be produced as a secondary symptom of the venereal disease. The first object of the surgeon on discovering the cause, is the enlargement of the constricted part - this is accomplished by means of the rectum bougie or where the stricture is very small, the urethra bougie must be used. It has sometimes been found necessary, to cut with a probe pointed curved bistoury, that part of the stricture contiguous to the sacrum, by which operation the introduction of the bougie is much facilitated.
The patient should take mild purgative medicines and continue the use of the Bougie for sometime after the stricture is removed, as it is apt to return, Where there is reason to suspect venereal taint, Mercury should be given in addition to the use of the bougie. - The disease is sometimes of a Cancerous nature and in such cases there is little hope of effecting a cure. Secondly,
Hemorrhoidal Excrescences, are often a cause as well as effect of Constipation. - the pain on going to stool being very great, the effort is suppressed for many

days and thus the desire to evacuate the bowels is done away and the habit of Constipation established. The Inflammation from the extirpation of these tumours, sometimes produces stricture of the Rectum and its consequences. 3rdly Enlarged Prostate Gland, What is called the third lobe of this gland is subject to enlargement by disease, producing very often a serious impediment to the passage of urine, but the whole gland may become so increased in size as by pressure to prove a source of obstinate costiveness - in such cases the tumour may be felt by making an examination per anum. 4thly Membranous filaments intersecting the Rectum have been known to produce the disease in question, this state of things is also effectually relieved by the use of the Bougie & keeping the bowels in a soluble state. 5thly Fistulæ in ano. from the same reason as I have said Piles do, may give rise to a habit of Constipation.

It sometimes happens, that alvine concretions and large biliary calculi may cause the retention and induration of faculent matter, proving a constant source of Irritation,

Cases of this kind are related in the works of Hey, White &c in many of which the scoop used in Lithotomy was found useful in extracting the concretions and breaking down the mass.

I shall now proceed to speak of a certain constipated condition which very frequently attends women in the latter months of pregnancy. It is well known that child bearing women are extremely liable to a very troublesome degree of Costiveness, from the bulk of the fœtus deranging and compressing the intestines - by which a morbid dilatation of the rectum sometimes takes place, which the size figure of the faces evacuated fully disclose. There have also been known cases of this pouch being formed where pregnancy was out of the question, and where there was reason to suppose the enlargement natural, but whether it be natural or artificial (if I may be allowed the expression) it will always operate as a predisposing cause to a very dangerous accumulation of hardened faces in the rectum and therefore when we know the existence of such a cause, it should enter into our views in the treatment

of Colic, at the same time as such a condition has been found to be present, without any obvious predisposing cause, the possibility of the existence of accumulations of this nature ought not to be lost sight of, in any case of real colic attended by a costive habit of body. Mr Bishopprick in the Edinburgh Medical commentaries relates several interesting cases of this complaint, and strongly insists upon the necessity of close examinations, in those cases of pregnancy where there is reason to suspect any morbid accumulations We would here infer also the importance of such patients paying strict attention to their bowels, and on no account neglect the use of aperient medicine, to obviate any costiveness that might occur.-

It now remains for me to speak of a species of Constipation which makes its appearance under a very obscure form and a Practitioner, unless fully aware of its nature, would be very apt to mistake it for a disease which is diametrically opposite - he might mistake it for a Diarrhœa - and it must be evident to all, that the pursuing of a plan adapted to the cure of the latter would

be highly injudicious and even pernicious.— The use of astringents would but increase the disease and render it more difficult to cure. An accumulation of hardened feces may take place in the intestines, and in consequence of the irritation induced— the peristaltic motion, be considerably increased, and yet the bowels be unable to expel the offending causes,— but a liquid discharge will occur— affording little or no relief— thus misleading a young and inexperienced physician.

This particular condition comes on in a very insidious manner.— The person may have daily evacuations— the bowels may discharge part of their contents— still a sufficient portion be retained, as eventually to give rise to this unpleasant and irritating condition. The following cases will illustrate, more fully than any description which I can give of the complaint.

In the London Observations and Enquiries, is mentioned the case of an elderly gentleman thus afflicted, The apothecary first called in, had been administering Bark— Rhubarb, Testacea, &c supposing him to be labour-

be highly

ing under a diarrhœa, But upon another Practitioner being sent for, he observed that he had frequent motions to stool and these were extremely urgent, some thin excrement was discharged on these occasions, but the pain and desire no ways diminished, but returned with redoubled violence. From the violence of the returns the Physician suspected some obstruction in the Rectum. A tenesmus always succeeded the discharges. The apprentice was directed to introduce his finger into the gut, and the cause of the complaint was at once apparent. he brought away a large quantity of hardened fæces and from that moment all unpleasant symptoms vanished. The following Cases which occurred in the practice of Dr Parrish, shew the importance of Close distinctions "S. T. a respectable* tho' in rather an obscure situation in life, several weeks after parturition, was attacked with great pain and distress in the abdomen. When I visited her, she began the description of her disease, by saying that she laboured under a "Putrid Lax." She applied this term, from the fator

* woman

of the evacuations, On making further inquiry, I ascertained that she had been affected for some time, and obtained no relief from the discharges, - still the disease of the abdomen increased. On observing the case, I suspected a mass of impacted faces in the bowels and my inquiries tended to confirm my suspicions. She was taking Opium, Port wine and Bark to restrain the "Lax". You can easily understand that this practice was directly opposite to that calculated to relieve the patient. I explained my views to her she was fully disposed to enter into them. A plan of evacuation was pursued, by means of Cathartic medicines - first Oil was tried, as she was a delicate woman, - her stomach retained it well, and a number of doses was given - they happily succeeded in bringing away a large quantity of hardened faces to her indescribable relief - she told me, she thought the mass had been lodged there for five weeks. At first the discharges were very offensive, and their fator had nearly made her faint - but there was soon an end of the disease

About the same time, I attended a little girl in the family of Capt. B.B. this case really resembled Diarrhœa, but suspicion was excited from the fact, that no relief was obtained from

the discharges, that there was an indurated mass which required removal. There was also considerable fever in this case, which called for the use of the Lancet several times. A large blister was applied to the abdomen, Injections and Cathartics were employed. she passed a large quantity of hard faculent matter and the disease was done away in a short time.

I was called to a little boy, in consequence of great distress in the bowels - he strained much at stool, - had liquid evacuations mixed with a little blood. I suspected at once a mass of indurated faces - and I was immediately convinced of the fact by an Injection which I had ordered being resisted at once. and I found the rectum filled with faces like a ball. The only way to succeed, was to break down the mass by mechanical means and this was done by a round handle desert spoon. The Cathartic administered, then acted and he was relieved - The diet in these cases was of such a kind as was not likely to cause indurations of the faculent matter. From these cases you can understand, that you should be on your guard when called to cases where Diarrhoea is supposed to exist. In many cases the manual operation, will be found necessary to break down the mass."

The indications of cure here, are very obvious – to keep up the peristaltic action by means of Cathartics, as the Ol: Ricini or Senna or by Jalap & Crem: Tart; &c The warm bath may be of service, Injections are to be used if they can be thrown into the bowels – if not, the mass should be broken down by mechanical means. In giving Injections, we may occasionally resort with advantage, to flexible tubes of some length; as it sometimes happens, that we may desire to carry the injecting matter high up in the Colon, with a little attention it may be passed by the sigmoid flexure, – first introducing the tube as far as it will go in a straight direction and gradually pouring in the fluid, – expanding the intestine it advances – the colon will be reached with little difficulty.

It is of great importance to distinguish between this disease and Diarrhœa as the treatment differs widely. In the case before us, tho' the pain and uneasiness are very great and the impulse to go to stool is very strong, still the Patient experiences no relief from the evacuations – but not so in Diarrhœa – here the patient tho' his calls be frequent, generally obtains relief for a time. Or should the person have

been long costive or subject to Constipations, the inference will be, that it is the consequence of Constipation, but should the description given by the Patient, and the preceeding circumstances induce the Practitioner still to hesitate, an examination, attended with no danger, and performed in most cases with little difficulty will soon clear up the matter.

There is however one disease, or condition with which this may be confounded, It is excoriations about the anus as takes place in the latter stages of Dysentery and Diarrhea There is great pain and tho' there be copious discharges the tenesmus will cause the patient to remain long at stool. Here also an examination will frequently explain the cause.

In many Persons Constipation seems to be constitutional or the Bowels by some irregularities have acquired a predisposition of habit of Costiveness, and it shall now be my object to endeavour to point out the best method, of correcting this habit. . . . . ut si,

Cæcus iter monstrare velit. Hor.

As this state, in common may depend either on a deficient Irritability of the Intestines, or on a Suppression or Vitiation of

the Bile, by mentioning those causes which may have a tendency to induce these conditions, the means calculated to obviate them will be better understood.

As excessive mental exertions, severe study and close confinement are prominent causes in the production of dyspepsia so can we readily imagine, how the operation of the same, may give origin to a costive habit, to which it bears a strong relation, and it is not at all uncommon to perceive Dyspeptics afflicted with the most obstinate Constipation. Hence sedentary persons are peculiarly liable to the complaint, and hence also we would infer the necessity of those afflicted in this manner using moderate exercise. Dr Thomas, says that those of a sanguineous and choleric temperament and those subject to Hypochondriac affections, especially when conjoin'd with inactive habits, are very subject to the disorder.

It arises frequently, by neglecting the accustomed time of going to stool and checking the natural tendency to the salutary excretions. A daily attendence at the privy and soliciting a naturals discharge of the contents of the bowels should be advised before we resort to the continual use of

purgatives, for "the use of every cathartic medicine creates a necessity for its repetitions and by this repetition the Bowels lose their energy - their delicate nerves become torpid to the stimulus of the food and drinks and the secretions formed from them"

Dr Parrish relates the case of an old lady who for 30 years had been accustomed to take a portion of Rhubarb every night and it seemed as if she could not live without it. This habit was never broken until she was in articulo mortis.

Persons thus situated should endeavour to bring about regular habits of attending the privy, the necessity of which Dr Rush used strongly to inculcate - it should never be deviated from, and as we are "the creatures of habit" it will often happen that the practice will be so well established that the system will look for it regularly. We would suggest too the propriety of not waiting until an impulse be felt, for this may arise when it is inconvenient to satisfy it - it is then laid aside, and the habit of Constipation is thus acquired.

Among the causes enumerated as producing this Irritability we are, an extraordinary heat of the body and copious sweats - the free use of Opium, as retarding or suspending the peri-

staltic motion may render the cause of the disease more obstinate.— the receiving into the stomach a larger proportion of solid food, than is proper for the quantity of liquids swallowed. indeed irregularities of diet are a very fruitful cause of costiveness and a proper attention to diet may have a considerable influence in obviating the disease,
1st All food that is dry, heating and difficult of digestion should be avoided, 2nd Drinking freely and frequently of Portwine as being astringent is particularly injurious. 3rd Some of the farrinaceous articles, having a slight laxative property, may be employed with advantage, and with this view the rye bread is useful, Dr Rush recommended bread made of rye and indian meal.— Professor Barton was in the habit of giving Columbo Root in powder, but as a general rule, where drugs can be avoided it were better. — the bowels will look for them — & they have not unaptly been compared, to "a lazy horse, which waits for the crack of the whip before he starts" 4th A diet of aperient vegetables and ripe fruits with the ordinary drink of malt liquors is also recommended for those of costive habits.

In addition to attention to the diet, it is often requisite to give medicine, for if the habit be not overcome, it is very apt to produce many highly disagreeable symptoms, such as head ache, vertigo, nausea, fœtid breath &c, and it sometimes gives rise to and confirms diseases of a more serious nature. Where we suppose these morbid accumulations to originate in deficient Irritability, we should resort to the more stimulating Cathartics, to subdue the sluggishness of the Peristaltic motion. It is astonishing to see, in some cases what inordinate quantities of medicine are required before any effect can be produced upon the Bowels. It would appear sometimes that they were determined to resist the greatest efforts of medical skill. In a case which I saw at the Pennsylvania Hospital, the man was not relieved until upwards of thirty enemata had been administered and the whole class of Cathartic medicines had been exhausted. In some cases, singular as it would appear, the milder Purgatives have been found to answer where those of a more powerful character had failed.

It is the practice of Professor Chapman to employ-

Calomel in large doses two or three times in the course of a few days and then to take every night on going to bed a combination of equal parts of Lac Sulphuris and Calcined Magnesia; But where deficiency or vitiation of the Bile is supposed to give origin to the complaint, "it is right, says Dr C. under such circumstances, to endeavour to excite the action of the bowels by strong mercurial purges – 5 grains of the Blue Pill every night, to be washed off in the morning by some slight purgative." If these means should fail, it would be proper to induce a gentle Ptyalism.

In cases of inveterate Constipation where the usual simple remedies have failed, Carbon, or Charcoal divested of heat has been administered with good success in many instances. I can easily conceive this to be a very proper remedy in the complaint, as conjoined with its laxative powers – the property which it possesses of correcting the fetor which exists in the breath and evacuations would render it a most valuable article.

The Bile of animals has been proposed as a substitute for the want of it in the human systems, by seve-

ral German writers, but independently of its acting sometimes as a laxative, I should should suppose it to exert but little power.

The affusion of cold water on the extremities and abdomen has been mentioned by authors, as having procured the desired effect when all other means resorted to, had proved abortive. The effects of cold in raising or exciting the action of internal parts, when applied to the surface, is well known, hence when constipation is the result of torpor of the intestines, a trial of its powers may be advantageous. Dr Thomas in his work, says, that in several cases of Colica Pictonum the application of cold in the manner above described proved highly efficacious.

Tartarized Antimony exhibited in the form of an enema, has been found to succeed in several cases of obstinately constipated bowels, It is usual to prescribe a scruple of half a drachm in this manner.

Tobacco as enema also, is of great utility in many instances, especially when proceeding from strangulated

hernias. The fumes of the tobacco have a similar effect.

The Oil of Croton has lately been resorted to for the purposes of evacuating the alimentary canal, and I have no doubt but that its judicious employment will prove a most powerful auxiliary in the treatment of Constipation. I had not long since an opportunity of witnessing its good effects in the case of a gentleman whose Bowels had been more or less obstructed for three weeks, A single drop of the medicine made up in a Pill procured most copious discharges & afforded great relief.

These are all the remarks which I have to offer on the subject of Constipation and I respectfully submit them for the perusal of the Professors.

John Roaman Paul

No 74

Deportation
und
Transportation
von
William J. Sotern, N. York

Pepin, March 5th 1812
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